

Component 1: Community Engagement and Vision

Scope: Engage and inspire communities to create a shared vision for the future and set goals for collective action.

Introduction

The transformation of your United Way around our new mission of community impact will bring powerful and relevant solutions to your community's problems. United Way provides communities the opportunity to engage in the development of a powerful vision and achieve real and lasting improvements in people's lives. Working with the community to understand its strengths and aspirations, United Way is uniquely positioned to catalyze a collective commitment to change. And, as a system, by sharing our ideas and our learnings about strengthening communities, we can bring these ideas to scale and accelerate solutions to some of the nation's most pressing social problems.

This new work is more difficult and qualitatively different than our previous work. It is the difference between providing quality shelter and food for 100 homeless people versus reducing the rate of homelessness by half over the next five years. Obviously, we cannot do this alone. It will require significant resources spent in a purposeful way over a long period of time on specific and tested strategies. It requires collaboration that leads to identification of priorities, agreement on how the problems will be solved and ultimately alignment of resources around these problems and strategies.

These standards for Community Engagement & Vision identify a range of opportunities for community involvement. United Ways must be willing to tackle tough issues and work to understand the scope and dimension of the problems we want to address. Our very understanding of "community" is broadened in the new work, as our definition is not limited by our geographic boundaries but rather including people united by common interests and a shared commitment to act. As we broaden our conception of community, we will work with and recognize existing and emerging leaders and provide multiple methods to engage their expertise and energy.

We must work with the community to create and shape a shared vision for the future. It starts with:

- Knowing the formal and informal leaders in the community, and understanding the social and economic landscape
- Listening to and learning from members of the community
- Building a commitment to act on shared goals.

This component is at the heart of community impact work. It calls the community to be engaged in creating a shared vision and committed to act to improve community conditions. Once there is a shared understanding and commitment to act, the work becomes focused on the objectives and strategies discussed in *Impact Strategies, Resources and Results*.

Effectively engaging the community requires strong foundations in relationship building, brand management and organizational leadership. Sharing best practices in community engagement and visioning can help bring success to scale across the United Way system and accelerate solutions to pressing national problems.

STANDARD 1.1: KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMMUNITY. United Way identifies, understands and engages existing and emerging communities and builds relationships with community leaders and people of influence in all sectors.

Practices:

- 1.1(a) Identifying Communities of Interest.** Identify and understand communities of interest. “Community” includes people united by common interests and a shared commitment to act. It may be based on geographic location, shared characteristics, demographics, or concern for a particular issue.
- 1.1(b) Strong Relationships with Leaders.** Build strong working relationships with existing and emerging community leaders and people of influence in communities of interest.

STANDARD 1.2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND MOBILIZATION. United Way listens to, learns from and motivates diverse individuals, groups and sectors to better understand, become involved in and take action on priority issues.

Community Engagement and Mobilization

“Central to the process is authentic engagement with the community, in whatever way community is defined, to set agendas for community impact.” The Essential Attributes of a Community Impact United Way

Practices:

- 1.2(a) Building on Strong Relationships.** Recognize and build on our relationships with the private sector and nonprofit sector. Seek the leadership and involvement of business and nonprofit leaders in engaging, informing and building the community vision.
- 1.2(b) Engaging a Wide Spectrum of the Community.** Actively involve diverse groups who represent the community. Seek involvement from those most representative, not simply the most apparent or vocal.

United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta commits to several principles of participation and inclusion:

- Directly involve people affected by issues to decide, develop and implement solutions
- Respect and embrace differences
- Create an environment that welcomes and supports the participation of all people who want and value the opportunity to work together.

- 1.2(c) Providing a Variety of Opportunities for Input and Involvement.** Create a range of opportunities for input and involvement, which may include surveys, focus groups, community research, listening sessions, town hall meetings, and visioning sessions.
- 1.2(d) Using Community Research.** Provide research-based information in understandable formats disseminated in a variety of ways and venues. Inform the community about priority issues and possible responses. Explain how residents and community groups can create positive change in community conditions.
- 1.2(e) Connecting People to Volunteer and Leadership Development Opportunities.** Develop or support systems that encourage volunteering and community involvement on priority issues and ensure effective volunteer management practices (e.g., volunteer centers and 2-1-1). Identify, learn from and develop community leadership. Involve non-traditional or non-represented groups (e.g., youth) who are critical to your community's future.
- 1.2(f) Ensuring Community Crisis Readiness and Response.** Establish a leadership role in community planning and preparation for crisis events. Collaborate with other partners to mobilize individuals, families, vulnerable populations and human service institutions in response to crises.
- 1.2(g) Recognition.** Publicly recognize and celebrate those who give time, talent or knowledge to better the community.

STANDARD 1.3: SHARED COMMUNITY VISION. United Way and the community establish a shared vision for the future by creating a collective understanding of key community interests, aspirations, assets and concerns which represent the perspectives of diverse groups, individuals and sectors.

Practices:

- 1.3(a) Gathering Information.** Collaborate with other partners to assemble information about community conditions and suggestions to heighten understanding, awareness and dialogue about priority issues.
- 1.3(b) Sharing Information.** Support coordinated access to information on community conditions from various sources. Regularly disseminate information to the

community, including decision makers, partners, investors, local elected officials, other funding sources and the media.

- 1.3(c) Promoting Community Dialogue and Deliberation.** Participate in public deliberation by hosting or promoting formal and informal dialogues with various communities to seek diverse perspectives and identify pressing issues. Utilize a variety of techniques to ensure participation.

Greater Twin Cities United Way began their work by holding focus groups in places where people naturally congregated—churches, workplaces, schools—asking about important issues in the community.

- 1.3(d) Building a Community Vision.** Based on information and dialogue, build a shared community vision that identifies priority issues, assets and aspirations of your community.

STANDARD 1.4: PUBLIC POLICY ENGAGEMENT. Because government is a critical decision-maker and the major provider and funder of health and human services, United Way must actively engage in public policy and develop partnerships that include local, state and federal governments along with the private sector and nonprofit sector.

In reflecting upon the work of United Way of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, President Bill Meyer notes: "Our focus on children stimulated a clamor for the public sector to recognize its responsibility and underscored to us that we have to impact the thinking of public sector leaders."

- 1.4(a) Convening Policy Briefings.** Serve as a convener of different voices in the community, fostering straightforward discussion and debate on public policy issues. Organize or participate in briefings for public officials, legislators, business leaders and the nonprofit sector to inform and shape policy related to your community's priority issues. When appropriate, serve as coalition builder and advocate.
- 1.4(b) Building Relationships with Public Officials.** Develop and maintain cooperative working relationships with current and emerging federal, state and local elected and appointed officials and their staff. Enlist the involvement of public officials on your committees and board.
- 1.4(c) Determining Public Policy Priorities.** Encourage awareness of and involvement in determining local public policy priorities to advance your community's strategies for impact. Set measurable goals which encourage and ensure the desired results.
- 1.4(d) Public Policy Infrastructure.** Establish board and staff-level responsibility for engaging with the community and formulating your United Way's position on critical public policy issues.